WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for using a voice-messaging system to place local and long-distance telephone calls, comprising

a voice-messaging system receiving a call placed by a user;

verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

receiving from the user a request to place a telephone call;

receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called; and

placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user.

2.   The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

3.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of receiving a call placed by a user comprises receiving a toll-free call from the user.

4.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

5.   The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the step of receiving a telephone number comprises receiving a long-distance telephone number to be called.

6.   The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein the charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

7.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

8.   The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

1   9. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system

2 directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined

3 signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

1   10. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the

2 telephone call to the third-party number comprises establishing a 3-way call between the user,

3 the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

1   11. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the

2 telephone call to the third-party number comprises:

3   establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone

4 line; and

5   disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call.

1   12. The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:

2   during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-

3 defined signal from the user; and

4   transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

1   13. An article of manufacture, comprising:

2   a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means

3 embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place local and long-distance

4 telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture

5 comprising;

6   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a

7 call placed by a user;

8   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify

9 that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

10   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive -

11 from the user a request to place a telephone call;

12   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive

13 from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called; and

14   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a

15 telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party

16 telephone number entered by the user.

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1　　　　　14.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party
3　telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

1　　　　　15.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid
3　user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and
4　verify a user-identification code and a password code.

1　　　　　16.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a telephone number
3　comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a long-
4　distance telephone number to be called.

1　　　　　17.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 16, wherein the user-
2　identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-
3　distance call are charged to the billing account.

1　　　　　18.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice
3　between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

1　　　　　19.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-
3　messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

1　　　　　20.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-
3　messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the
4　process of placing a call to a third party.

1　　　　　21.　The article of manufacture as recited in claim 14, wherein the
2　computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party
3　telephone line via the telephone call comprises computer-readable program means for
4　causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging
5　system and the third-party telephone line.

1   22.   The article of manufacture of claim 14, wherein the computer-readable

2   program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via

3   the telephone line comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to

4   establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and

5   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the

6   voice messaging system from the call.

1   23.   The article of manufacture as recited in claim 21, further comprising

2   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal

3   from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party; and

4   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user

5   back to a voice-messaging-system menu.